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RWANDA: Crisis Spurs Reforms

President Habyarimana last week introduced an economic reform package, announced that new national identity cards will exclude tribal affiliation, and launched a transition to multiparty democracy to shore up his beleaguered regime. Ethnic Tutsi rebels have rejected his moves and insist that he and his Hutu-dominated regime be removed. Skirmishes continue between the Army—still supported by France and Belgium—and small rebel groups along the Tanzanian and Ugandan borders. [redacted] France backs a regional settlement on refugees and has offered to finance a regional summit, a peacekeeping force, and the resettlement of all Rwandan refugees. Military delegations from Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the rebels are meeting in Zaire to create a joint force to patrol the Rwandan-Ugandan border. The UN High Commission for Refugees is organizing a regional summit on the refugee problem that may convene late this month in Tanzania. [redacted]

[redacted] Habyarimana probably made his announcement in the hope of maintaining foreign, especially French, economic and political support. He also probably believes his reform initiatives will preempt rebel demands. The prospects of concessions to Tutsi interests and of economic austerity, however, risk jeopardizing his position at home, particularly with Hutu hardliners in the military, and may limit his maneuvering room in regional talks. [redacted]

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